

RELIGION A REALITY,

Exemplified in the

Life and Death

OF

ELIZABETH GOLDNEY,

LATE OF AYLESBURY.

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WE have lately lost a member of our church, a pious young woman. Her confinement to a sick chamber, during the space of four months, was attended with peculiar circumstances of faith and patience. As I constantly visited her during her illness, and minuted down in my diary various expressions which she dropped, I shall transcribe them for your perusal.

At the latter end of December, 1794, I found her disorder gained strength, and her case appeared dangerous. In her mind she was calm, resigned, and happy; she assured me that the Lord had manifested his love to her soul more clearly in this affliction than at any time before; that she had no doubt but he designed her benefit by it. That

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many promises of his word she could appropriate to herself, and derive comfort from them." She requested me to read the 103d psalm, to which she attended with some expressive emotions. After prayer was made for her, she observed, with peculiar emphasis, "How great a blessing is it to know Jesus Christ? For three years, said she, have I been exercised with doubts and fears, and have been seeking an interest in Christ, and now the Lord's time is come, and *his time* is always best. Had I strength I could sing that hymn,

Oh! to grace how great a debtor,
Daily I'm constrained to be, &c.

I cannot find words, as I wish, to praise God. My friends are too deeply concerned for me and thereby pain me. They would not be so concerned about me if they knew how happy I am."

Sunday, January 4, I found her in an heavenly frame of spirit, which seemed to glow with increasing fervour. "When you began your lectures upon the Lord's prayer, said she, I was troubled and cast down, because I could not say *assuredly* God was my father, but now I *know* he is my father. Not one of my doubts or fears remain, *no not one*. I know that my Redeemer liveth. Next sabbath is sacrament day, I should be glad to be with you; however the Lord will be here with me, and *his presence* is all in all." She desired me to read Isa. the 43d chap. the precious promises of which, she had found powerfully applied, and by the divine blessing, rendered infinitely sweet to her mind. She felt the tenderest respect for her christian friends, and earnestly wished to see them. She

found, by happy experience, as she observed, that the presence of God rendered her pains supportable. "I esteem it, said she, a great mercy that I have been preserved from murmuring; I wish to murmur at nothing but *sin*. After extreme pain, in the night, during which I wished earnestly but one quarter of an hour's ease, this verse came to my mind with great sweetness,

"We are travelling home to God,

"In the way the fathers trod;

"They are happy now, and we

"Soon their happiness shall see."

Awhile after this she said, "Oh! what evil there must be in *sin*, that nothing but the blood of Christ could atone for it! The composure I have found, and the supports which have attended me in this affliction, more than compensate the pains which I have been called to endure. Oh! that more of the people of *Aylesbury* did but know the blessedness of real religion! I do find Christ's flesh to be meat indeed, and his blood to be drink indeed." For her funeral sermon, she chose *Psa. xxvi. 8.* *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thine house, the place where thine honour dwelleth.* And added, "These words I can say from my very heart." She repeated some animating verses, with great energy of thought and expression. In another visit, I found her in a most excellent frame of mind, rich in grace and consolation. "Oh! said she, what a sweet Father have I, (meaning a covenant God;) I fear nothing; I do not fear death at all. It is no more to me than going to sleep. I think human nature, in its *present state*, could not always bear to be so happy as I am." She earnestly wished

that her affliction might be sanctified to her brother and sister (with whom she lived) and for whom she expressed an high regard. She observed, that notwithstanding she had so long struggled with doubts and fears, she sometimes had most sweet and profitable opportunities at the house of God, and the word preached was made a blessing to her soul.

Thursday, February 4, she was greatly reduced, said " I have lost all appetite for food, but I hope I shall not lose my appetite for *spiritual* food. I should be glad to go to the house of God once more, if it pleased God to permit ; but his will be done : I know I shall be happy if I die this night. From the violent pain I felt last night I thought I could not live till morning, but I felt no alarming fears. I believe I shall stand bold at the *last day*. I know that all my sins are atoned for. From love to the house of God, I have often attended with the greatest difficulty, arising from bodily weakness and indisposition. The more pain I now experience, the more I love the Lord ; for I evidently find that in proportion as my pains increase, a sweet sensibility of his gracious and supporting presence increases. I shall be with Jesus, and that soon. When I am safe landed, I shall be out of the reach of every enemy. God is the strength of my heart and will be my portion for ever. It is an hard thing to be a christian, though people in general think *so light* of the matter.— Let me see the *dying babe* (her sister's child, which died a few weeks before her own decease,) I love to see any thing which puts me in mind of death.

Death has lost his sting.—I sometimes feel a degree of *impatience* ; I weep for it, and I strive against it. Many promise themselves much happiness in things of this life, but are often, and sometimes fatally, disappointed : but we shall not be disappointed in our hopes of heaven ; there we shall meet to praise our God for ever and ever. This day I thought I should die, and I cannot describe the happiness I felt." She considered it beyond the power of language to convey an adequate idea. She expressed her wishes to be in glory, and said

When shall the day, dear Lord, appear,
That I shall mount to dwell above?
And stand and bow amongst 'em there,
And view thy face, and sing thy love.

And afterwards, lifting up her eyes to heaven with an expressive look, she added,

Why was I made to hear thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?

I do not repent renouncing the world, and seeking Christ. Well may Christ call his people his jewels, seeing they cost such a price! *Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able.* This passage has been a great deal of trouble to me in time past, but it is no trouble to me now. When I am weak in myself than am I strong in the Lord." Here her faith shone out as the meridian sun! No complaint of darkness. She appeared, for the most part of her illness, to enjoy an unclouded sky ; a sweet and perpetual serenity. Her only complaint, was want

of ability to praise and glorify God. I wish, said she, that Pope's *Vital spark of heavenly flame*, * might be sung at my funeral; I have been recollecting the whole of it this day, and it was uncommonly sweet.—I have no other refuge but Christ, and I desire no other. He is with me, and he will be with me to the last, I am going to heaven. In the Lord's house below the light of heaven has often beamed upon my soul.

Friday, March 13, she assured me that she was happy, and had such views of heaven as she never had before. "Oh! said she, heaven appears so sweet, I long, oh! I long to be there. But, I desire to wait the Lord's time.—No half christians go to heaven. *Unbelief* is very displeasing to God. I never saw, 'till this illness, how much it is so. Oh! what a blessing is a throne of grace! God is a God hearing prayer, in some instances he has answered me before I have ended my petition." Addressing herself, at another time, to some of her christian friends, as they stood near her dying bed, said she, "Be ready, life is very uncertain. Hold on, Mrs. A——, hold on, *grace* can enable you to persevere." She repeated part of several hymns with the finest and most expressive energy. Her countenance was serene, and her manner of expression highly rational and perfectly composed. At another time, she said, "Live near to God, in all the means of grace; I never found such sweetness as when I lived nearest to God. Remember, no drunkard, no swearer, no sabbath-breaker will enter into the kingdom of heaven." (She meant

* An excellent poem by the celebrated Mr. Pope.

unless a change of heart and true repentance should take place.)—Upon occasion of one of her brothers coming to see her, whom she instantly knew, she addressed him in a very serious and affectionate manner. She assured him that there is indeed a reality in religion. She begged of him to read the bible and to pray over it. “God, said she, can take away your stony heart, and give you in exchange an heart of flesh. He has promised this, and what he has promised he will perform. There is nothing like trusting in the Lord. The bible is the book to read, not ballads or idle story-books. The world says, that religious people are unhappy, but that is their mistake. Oh! could I tell you the happiness I experience upon this dying bed, but I cannot express it. I shall soon be where Jesus is ; where trouble shall cease, and where tears shall be wiped from all faces.” She had some powerful conflicts with the great enemy of souls, and her faith strongly assaulted, but eventually braved every assault, and triumphed gloriously. “Come, come Lord Jesus, come quickly,” was her cry. She retained the free and perfect use of her faculties to the last, and expired with the Redeemer’s name upon her lips, Monday morning, five o’clock, April 27, 1795.

I am, &c. &c.

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